

Derek Wallbank, *MinnPost*

WASHINGTON - After all that, it wasn't even close.

The Obama/GOP deal on extending the Bush-era tax cuts sailed through the House, 277-148, despite fierce opposition from liberal Democrats that threatened to derail the measure by denying it a vote.

From Minnesota in favor: Democrats Jim Oberstar, Collin Peterson and Tim Walz, as well as Republicans John Kline and Erik Paulsen. Against: Democrats Keith Ellison and Betty McCollum, and Republican Michele Bachmann. (Side note: How many times have those names been on those sides of any issue? Ever?)

The tax cut and unemployment benefits extension now goes to the president's desk, where President Obama (who brokered the compromise with GOP leaders) will undoubtedly sign it.

A few interesting things struck me about this vote, which could have ramifications beyond tonight.

* In caucus, Democrats voted against even bringing the bill to the floor. After Obama whipped up support, more Democrats supported the bill (139) than opposed it (112). Clearly the president has clout in his own caucus to whip up votes where they didn't seem to exist. It's been done before (health reform, cap and trade in the House), and this was a reminder that he's still got it.

* In fact, as Slate's Dave Weigel noted, the two-year extension passed with even more yes votes (277) than the original tax cuts had (230), suggesting that elected officials are even more committed to tax cuts at any cost than they were 10 years ago.

* I say "at any cost" because this tax cut/unemployment deal will add an estimated \$893 billion to the deficit over the next five years, according to the non-partisan Congressional Budget Office. Most of that cost, \$756 billion worth, is in the tax cuts.

* Despite all the talk of deficit reduction, there's no cut offset in this legislation at all. Let me repeat: None. This bill was declared an "emergency," officially exempting it from PAYGO rules.

* I hope you enjoyed this debate, because this is a two-year extension, meaning this exact same debate is coming again in 2012.

* Lastly, (and hat tip to my friend Niels Lesniewski from CQ-Roll Call for pointing this out) it should be noted that this bill was probably the last Jim Oberstar-authored bill to pass the House. How was it an Oberstar bill, you ask? Because the vehicle bill this tax cut was appended to was Oberstar's FAA reauthorization, meaning his name is at the top of the final product.

